

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIAL

One Page Lessons

Book 1

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Authors:

Shirley Wu
Joy Carr

Edited and revised by:

Jodi Cataldo

(Acknowledge your team here.)

This book is not for sale.

It is not permissible to copy without permission.

Copyright ©2006 General Board of Discipleship and the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church. All rights reserved. A part of the material is adapted from "New Invitation, Grades 1 & 2; 3 & 4". Winter 1997-1998, Copyright ©1997 by Cokesbury, adapted by permission.

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIAL

One Page Lessons

BOOK ONE

PART I: THE BOOK OF GOD'S PEOPLE

THEME: The Bible is a special book of stories, songs, wisdom and history that tell about God and God's people.

- LESSON 1: THE BIBLE IS A SPECIAL BOOK
- LESSON 2: THE BIBLE IS A BOOK OF STORIES
- LESSON 3: THE BIBLE HELPS US KNOW ABOUT GOD
- LESSON 4: THE BIBLE HELPS US KNOW JESUS

PART 2: JESUS IS BORN

THEME: Let us celebrate Jesus' birth.

- LESSON 1: THE PROMISE OF THE SAVIOR
- LESSON 2: THE BIRTH OF JESUS
- LESSON 3: ANGELS BRING THE NEWS TO THE SHEPHERDS
- LESSON 4: WISE MEN WORSHIP THE KING

PART 3: THE PARABLES

THEME: We can discover what Jesus wants us to do by hearing the parables Jesus told.

- LESSON 1: THE GOOD SAMARITAN
- LESSON 2: THE HOUSE ON THE ROCK
- LESSON 3: THE SOWER
- LESSON 4: THE FORGIVING FATHER

THE BIBLE IS A SPECIAL BOOK

THE BIBLE: Psalm 34:4, Psalm 119:105, Psalm 121:1-2

THEME: The Bible is a special book of stories, songs, wisdom and history that tell about God and God's people.

PREPARING THE LESSON

1. MAIN IDEA: The Bible gives us guidance.

2. MEMORY VERSE: “Your word is a lamp that gives light wherever I walk.”—Psalm 119:105 CEV

3. KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS TO BE LEARNED:

- a. Word- refers to the word of God.
- b. Lamp- something that gives light.
- c. Light- something that makes things visible.

4. BIBLE BACKGROUND:

The Bible is the guidebook for Christians. Through it we learn the stories of God and Jesus, the Christ. Through the stories we learn what God expects of us and how we are to live if we believe. It is a book that has two sections: the Old Testament that we call the Hebrew text and the New Testament that contains the stories of Jesus and the early Christian church.

The book of Psalms is in the Old Testament. This book tells us that we can have a personal relationship with God (Psalm 34:4—“I sought the Lord and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.”) It also tells us that God is a comforter for us (Psalm 121:2—“My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”) The Psalms also tell us that the Bible gives us God's direction for our lives (Psalm 119:105). We experience freedom and a sense of direction when we live in harmony with God.

5. UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS:

We are all created in the image of God. Children are the best examples of the creative being that God intended us to be. They have imagination that will help them envision, they have curiosity that will help them raise questions, they have a desire to learn and they are open to new ideas and thoughts. They will learn best if we involve them in activities that capture their imagination.

Many children will not be able to read. They can learn through their interest in conversation, by looking at pictures and hearing stories. Telling children the stories of the Bible over and over will help them come to know about God. As you tell the story, hold the Bible in your hand. Let the children see, touch and hold the Bible. They will learn that it is a special book, even for them.

Children think that the teacher is right and depend greatly on your words and actions, as well as those of their parents, to give them a glimpse of how they are expected to live. As you help them discover the Bible and how they can have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, you will be giving them an anchor on which to tie, a point of guidance for their life and actions.

6. DEVELOPING YOUR FAITH:

Get to know the names of the books in the Bible and where to find them.

Read Psalm 34:4. What are you afraid of in your life? What calms you when you are afraid? Can you accept that God offers hope for you? Read Psalm 121:2. How does this scripture help you to understand more clearly that our God is a caring God? Read Psalm 119:105. Think of one experience you have had in which you know God is guiding your life.

THE BIBLE IS A BOOK OF STORIES

THE BIBLE: Genesis 6:9, Genesis 12:4-5

THEME: The Bible is a special book of stories, songs, wisdom and history that tell about God and God's people.

PREPARING THE LESSON

1. MAIN IDEA: The Bible has two parts and contains stories of God's people.

2. MEMORY VERSE: "Everything in the Scriptures is God's word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live."—II Timothy 3:16 CEV

3. KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS TO BE LEARNED:

- a. Old Testament- the first half of the book we know of as the Bible.
- b. New Testament- the second half of the Bible.
- c. Noah- a man called by God to follow God's direction.
- d. Abraham- a man called by God to leave his home and go where God tells him to.

4. BIBLE BACKGROUND:

The Bible has stories about God and God's people. As a book, the Bible has many writers. It is divided into two sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Each section is divided into many books.

The Old Testament gives us many stories about people who loved God and followed God's commands. One of the stories that helps us to understand how God works is the story of Noah. The verse used with this lesson tells us that Noah was a righteous man and that he was among the best people of his generation. Another story tells us about Abram (God later changed his name to Abraham.). Abram was an old man but he was attentive to God and followed God's orders to go into another land.

The New Testament gives us additional books with stories about God's work in the world.

5. UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS:

The Bible is a book that is written for adults. Children will not be able to understand many of the concepts. They will hear the stories over and over, each time with a little more understanding.

The terms Old and New Testament will not mean much to children. Try to help them understand that there are two parts of the Bible, each with many books. As they become more acquainted with the Bible, they will grow to understand that stories about Jesus are from the New Testament and that Jesus' life and teachings are the measures by which Christians live their lives.

6. DEVELOPING YOUR FAITH:

Read Genesis 6:9 and Genesis 12:4-5. What can the stories about people who lived so long ago say to you now?

As you prepare to lead children in the development of their faith, pray daily for each child who is in your group and ask God for guidance that you might understand the scriptures and help children to come to know God.

THE BIBLE HELPS US KNOW ABOUT GOD

THE BIBLE: Genesis 1:1-5, Psalm 121:1-2

THEME: The Bible is a special book of stories, songs, wisdom and history that tell about God and God's people.

PREPARING THE LESSON

1. MAIN IDEA: We know God as the caring creator of the world. As people who know and love God, we seek guidance from God that helps us know how to live as followers of God.

2. MEMORY VERSE: "My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."—Psalm 121:2 NASV

3. KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS TO BE LEARNED:

- a. Creation- the act of causing something to exist.
- b. Guidance- giving direction and leadership

4. BIBLE BACKGROUND:

The Bible, beginning in the book of Genesis, tells us about God's activity in the world. This is done through the creation story, through the stories about specific people chosen by God to do special things in the development of the world, and ultimately in the New Testament through the stories of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. These stories give us guidance for our life today.

The creation story helps us to understand that God is the creator of the world in which we live. The story as it is recorded in Genesis continues from Genesis 1:1 through Genesis 2:3.

The Psalm chosen for this lesson is one that tells us about how we can relate to God as one who is a guide and helper. Because we believe that God has created the world and that God continues to care for the world and its inhabitants, we can know that God will listen to us and help us know the way of life.

5. UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS:

The children may not know anything about the creation story according to the scriptures. They may have been given other explanations about the beginning of the world and their history as people who live in the world today. Children are concrete thinkers and do not always believe something that they cannot see. They may have a hard time understanding the concept of a God who was there before time and who continues to be concerned about the world and its people.

6. DEVELOPING YOUR FAITH:

As you think about the presence of God in the world and in your life, ask yourself in what ways God manifests that presence? Are you aware of ways in which God has acted in your life? If you have access to a Bible, read the entire creation story. How does this story connect with the stories from your tradition concerning the beginning of the world? Is this difficult for you to understand?

When we become a Christian, we have the scriptures to help us understand what the writers tell us is God's action and presence in the world. Much of what we believe is based upon our faith that these things really took place in some form. We can believe because we can experience God at work.

We can believe even if we do not actually see God or Jesus Christ in a physical body. What is your concept of God?

THE BIBLE HELPS US KNOW JESUS

THE BIBLE: Luke 4:16-20, Mark 10:13-16

THEME: The Bible is a special book of stories, songs, wisdom and history that tell about God and God's people.

PREPARING THE LESSON

1. MAIN IDEA: The New Testament tells stories about Jesus. The stories help us know what Jesus was like. Jesus was sent by God to help us know how to live our life in response to our love of God. Jesus was a man who loved children and saw value in them.

2. MEMORY VERSE: "...Let the children come to me! Don't try to stop them. People who are like these little children belong to the kingdom of God."—Mark 10:14b CEV

3. KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS TO BE LEARNED:

- a. Synagogue- a house of worship.
- b. Scroll- a rolled section of paper that held the words of God.
- c. Blessing- the act of using words or actions that show goodness.

4. BIBLE BACKGROUND:

The scripture selections for this lesson are two that show us something significant about Jesus. First of all, the Luke verses firmly establish that God sent Jesus into the world to be a different kind of leader. He was to care for those who were considered poor and those who had no voice of their own because of society and governmental regulations and prejudices. He came in order that people might know a different way of life. The second selection of verses in Mark is a very popular one to use with children. It helps them to know that Jesus cared about children and wanted all of us to have belief without question—just like little children.

5. UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS:

The children you teach may or may not know anything about Jesus Christ. They do not need to know all of the details around his life at this point since we are simply looking at the Bible as a book that introduces us to Jesus. Since most of them are unable to read, they learn the stories through what they hear. The stories are important for their faith development. Always ask questions like, "What do you hear and what does this story mean to you?" These kinds of questions will help them to think about what they are hearing.

6. DEVELOPING YOUR FAITH:

As you think about teaching the children about Jesus, you need to think about how you relate to Jesus in your personal life. Talk this week with someone who has more knowledge than you about Jesus. Ask them questions that you are dealing with in your understanding.

THE PROMISE OF THE SAVIOR

THE BIBLE: Luke 1

THEME: Let us celebrate Jesus' birth.

PREPARING THE LESSON

1. **MAIN IDEA:** God loves us. He promised to send His Son to show us His love.
2. **MEMORY VERSE:** "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."—Luke 1:32 CEV
3. **KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS TO BE LEARNED:**
 - a. God made a promise.
 - b. Jesus was that promise.
 - c. We prepare for Jesus' birth.
4. **MAJOR LEARNINGS:**

Mary and Elizabeth were willing to do what God asked of them in the promised Savior's coming. We can accept some responsibility for getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birth.
5. **BIBLE BACKGROUND:**

Luke 1:39-48 tells us that when Mary learned that she would be the mother of the Savior, she visited her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth recognized that Mary would be the mother of the Savior and congratulated Mary for her belief in the fulfillment of God's promise. In her song of praise, Mary humbly praised and thanked God for her part in the coming redemption of her people.

Luke 1:56-68 tells us that shortly after Mary returned to her home, Elizabeth gave birth to a son. Zechariah and Elizabeth joyously praised and thanked God for their son, John, who would prepare the way for the coming redemption of their people.

Both birth stories reflect the deep hope of the people who waited for a Messiah.
6. **UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS:**

Children often experience unexpected changes over which they have no control. They will be able to relate to Mary's and Elizabeth's fear at the sudden news of their part in the Savior's coming.
7. **DEVELOPING YOUR FAITH:**

Read Isaiah 9:17. The Hebrew people had been oppressed for centuries by other nations living around them. The promise of a Savior to deliver them gave them hope and kept the people going. Think about some dark times in your life when you felt discouraged or oppressed in some way. What comforted you and gave you hope for the future?

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

THE BIBLE: Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-7

THEME: Let us celebrate Jesus' birth.

PREPARING THE LESSON

1. MAIN IDEA: Jesus is God's Son.

2. MEMORY VERSE: "She gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him on a bed of hay, because there was no room for them in the inn."—Luke 2:7 CEV

3. KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS TO BE LEARNED:

- a. God's promise was fulfilled.
- b. Praise and worship.

4. MAJOR LEARNINGS:

Although the trip to Bethlehem was not easy for Mary and Joseph, they were joyful in the birth of Jesus. As we celebrate Jesus' birth, we can be joyful because we know that God loves us.

5. BIBLE BACKGROUND:

The trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, in Luke 2:1-5, probably took five days and four nights. Because they were poor, Mary and Joseph most likely slept under the stars using their cloaks as blankets.

It is assumed that Jesus was born in a stable because in Luke 2:6-7, Mary laid him in a manger, the animals' feed trough. Stables in those days were usually nothing more than a cave in which the animals were sheltered. Whether it was a cave or other kind of stable, Jesus' birth place was extremely crude.

In the Bible times, babies were wrapped tightly with bands of cloth to prevent them from waving their arms and legs, which they thought would weaken them. Luke 1:39-48 tells us that when Mary learned that she would be the mother of the Savior, she visited her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth recognized that Mary would be the mother of the Savior and congratulated Mary for her belief in the fulfillment of God's promise. In her song of praise, Mary humbly praised and thanked God for her part in the coming redemption of her people.

Luke 1:56-68 tells us that shortly after Mary returned to her home, Elizabeth gave birth to a son. Zechariah and Elizabeth joyously praised and thanked God for their son, John, who would prepare the way for the coming redemption of their people.

Both birth stories reflect the deep hope of the people who waited for a Messiah.

6. UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS:

Children today often experience times of stress and difficulty. They will be able to relate to Mary and Joseph's difficult journey. Children need to know that God loves them and will be with them in their difficult times and can bring good out of their stressful times. In this lesson they will learn that we know God loves us because Jesus is God's Son, sent to earth to show us God's love.

7. DEVELOPING YOUR FAITH:

Read Luke 2:1-7. Hospitality was an important part of life in Bible times. Travelers were welcomed in people's homes and treated as family members. Because of the crowded conditions in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph could not find a place to rest or anyone who would offer hospitality. How crowded are our lives? Do we offer hospitality to the children who are in our care? Do we make room for the new life Jesus can bring to us?

ANGELS BRING THE NEWS TO THE SHEPHERDS

THE BIBLE: Luke 2:8-38; Psalm 23:1-2; John 10:3-4

THEME: Let us celebrate Jesus' birth.

PREPARING FOR THE LESSON

1. MAIN IDEA: The Shepherds rejoiced that Jesus, God's Son was born.

2. MEMORY VERSE: "But the angel said, 'Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy.'"—Luke 2:10 CEV

3. KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS TO BE LEARNED:

- a. Jesus brings peace and joy.
- b. Jesus tells us not to be afraid.

4. MAJOR LEARNINGS:

Ordinary shepherds were the first people to hear the news of God's gift and they praised God. We also celebrate God's gift of Jesus.

5. BIBLE BACKGROUND:

In the story of the shepherds in Luke 2:8 -20, we again find the words "Don't be afraid." These words tell of a great redemptive God.

Poor, lowly shepherds were the first to hear the good news of the Savior's birth. This fact, together with the message of peace sung by the angels, foretold the kind of inclusive love Jesus brought to earth. Incredible as the news of the Savior's birth may have seemed, the shepherds did not question it. They knew this was coming from God. The shepherds were excited because they believed that the Messiah would change things and that life would be better for them.

Luke's Gospel once again reminds us of Jesus' humble beginnings. Although angels heralded Jesus' birth, those who first heard the message were peasants, shepherds on the hillside.

6. UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS:

Children know that we still do not have peace on earth. They are aware of wars and conflicts going on around the world as well as in their own country. They may question the Bible saying the Savior would bring peace, yet we do not have peace. Girls and boys need to understand that God sent a person, Jesus, into the world to demonstrate that people can make a difference and to show us how to make peace. Children need help in discovering ways they can make peace in their own situations.

7. DEVELOPING YOUR FAITH:

Read Luke 2:15-20. The shepherds reacted to the news of the Saviors' birth with joy and praise. How do you celebrate joy in your life? What difference does knowing Christ make in your life?

Read Psalm 96:1-4 as a prayer of praise.

WISE MEN WORSHIP THE KING

THE BIBLE: Matthew 2:1-12; Psalm 95:6

THEME: Let us celebrate Jesus' birth.

PREPARING THE LESSON

1. MAIN IDEA: The Wise Men worshiped Jesus as God's promised king.

2. MEMORY VERSE: "Bow down and worship the Lord our Creator!"—Psalm 95:6 CEV

3. KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS TO BE LEARNED:

- a. Giving thanks.
- b. Giving gifts is a way of sharing God's love.

4. MAJOR LEARNINGS:

Wise men from the East set out to look for the child Jesus and brought their finest gifts.
Jesus is God's gift to all people everywhere.

5. BIBLE BACKGROUND:

Matthew 2:1-12 is the only place in the Bible that tells about the Wise Men. Scholars believe that these Wise Men were astrologers, men who studied the stars. They recognized a new star's appearance as the sign for the birth of someone destined to be influential in the world. The bright star led them to search for the Savior. The Scriptures indicate that the wise men entered the "house" rather than the stable. Many scholars believe that the Magi/Wise Men arrived about two years after Jesus' birth. This would coincide with Herod's order to kill all children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under. King Herod, the appointed ruler of the Roman territory of Palestine, took no chances that this child would become the next King.

The Wise Men's visit symbolized Jesus' royal or kingly status. The gifts the Wise Men brought were suitable for royalty. Frankincense was a kind of incense. Myrrh was used for embalming. Gold was as valuable then as now. The tradition of gift-giving at Christmas dates back to these acts of praise.

6. UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS:

The Birth of Jesus, Christmas, is celebrated in many different ways in different countries. It is important that we not just borrow from other countries but that we develop our own traditions for celebrating Jesus' birth. However, one universal custom worthy of considering is the giving of gifts. God gave Jesus as a gift to the world and we are reminded of God's gift by sharing gifts with others. Children love to receive and give gifts but need help in understanding that gifts can be more than things. Gifts of service are needed and appreciated gifts.

7. DEVELOPING YOUR FAITH:

Read Matthew 2:1-8. The wise men were Gentiles* and they remind us that the good news of Jesus is for all people. Jesus' message of God's love is not just for those people whom you find lovable. Do you exclude anyone from God's love?

*Gentiles are non-Jewish nations. There were people who thought that Jesus had come only for the Jews who were the Israelites.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

THE BIBLE: Luke 10:25-37

THEME: We can discover what Jesus wants us to do by hearing the parables Jesus told.

PREPARING THE LESSON

1. **MAIN IDEA:** The students will learn who their neighbor is and find a way to show love.
2. **MEMORY VERSE:** “Love your neighbors as much as you love yourself.”—Luke 10:27b
3. **KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS TO BE LEARNED:**
 - a. Neighbors are people we know and do not know.
 - b. Love.

4. MAJOR LEARNINGS:

Children will learn that being a good neighbor means helping anyone. They will explore ways to be a good neighbor.

BIBLE BACKGROUND:

Jesus told this story of “The Good Samaritan” to answer a question by a lawyer (teacher of the Law), who had asked Jesus, “What must I do to receive eternal life?” The lawyer intended to prove his right to eternal life by showing that he had done his duty. But Jesus answered his question with another, saying “What does the Law (the Scripture) say?” So the teacher of the Law answered with the familiar verses from Deuteronomy 6:4-5: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.” Jesus answered, “You are right. Do this and you will live.” But the teacher of the Law still questioned Jesus and asked, “Who is my neighbor?” So Jesus told the story that is our lesson for today.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho—about 28 kilometers—was a very dangerous one, for robbers could easily hide in the hills and fall upon the travelers. There was a man who was robbed and left to die. Soon a priest came by, an important religious leader of the Jews. He may have been afraid that he too would be robbed, but there was probably a more important reason why he did not stop to see if he could help the injured man. If the man had been dead, and the priest had touched him, he would have been ritually “unclean”. He then could not have given sacrifices in the Temple for the people. So he passed him by. The Levite was a layman who helped the priest. He, too, passed by. The Samaritan who finally stopped was a foreigner, who no one would expect to show sympathy for a Jew. In fact, Jews and Samaritans hated one another. Jews looked down on Samaritans and would have nothing to do with them. But in the story, Jesus made a Samaritan play the part of a true neighbor.

Who is our neighbor? It is anyone who is in need, whatever their race or class. Jesus was saying that we must love God and love our neighbor. We cannot do one without the other.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS:

Boys and girls have a strong sense of fairness and may wish to help those who have suffered unfairness and injustice. The story of the good Samaritan is a good one to use in introducing the boys and girls to the concept of helping those who are strangers in our midst.

DEVELOPING YOUR FAITH:

Read Luke 10:25-37. Although the Samaritans and the Jews lived in countries next to each other, they were not good neighbors because they were different. How do we sometimes treat people just because they are different? Why?

THE HOUSE ON THE ROCK

THE BIBLE: Matthew 7:24-27

THEME: We can discover what Jesus wants us to do by hearing the parables Jesus told.

PREPARING THE LESSON

1. MAIN IDEA: Jesus told people to listen to God’s word and to do what they learned from it.

2. MEMORY VERSE: “Anyone who hears and obeys these teachings of mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock.”—Matthew 7:24 CEV

3. KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS TO BE LEARNED:

- a. Listen
- b. Obey

4. MAJOR LEARNINGS:

Children will learn what God wants them to do by listening to the stories Jesus told. They will be glad that God loves them because God’s love is their strong foundation.

5. BIBLE BACKGROUND:

The story of the house on the rock is a parable that tells both what something is like and also what it is not like. The illustration of the two houses must have occurred naturally to Jesus, who probably had been a carpenter. His listeners would have understood the reference to building on sand because in the topography of their country, sand often occurred in the dry beds of seasonal rivers. During the dry season one might safely and easily build a house in a dry bed. But at the coming of the rainy season, water would gush down and carry such a house away because it had no foundation.

Jesus was making the point that persons who listened to his words and lived according to them were building their lives on a strong foundation of faith and love. Those who seemed to listen and understand but did not live accordingly would not have strong inner reserves to call upon when adversity came.

6. UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILDREN:

Younger children (ages 3-8) are concrete thinkers and do not understand symbolism. Therefore they will have difficulty understanding that Jesus was talking about building lives on a good foundation of faith in God, but they can understand sitting and standing on a firm base. They can begin to understand the importance of listening. Older children (ages 8-12) are beginning to understand abstract thinking and can explore the meaning of the Bible stories. They understand cause and effect, and will understand why one house stood firm and the other did not in Jesus’ story. A few may be able to make the connection that Jesus was really talking about building one’s faith on a strong foundation of God’s love.

7. DEVELOPING YOUR FAITH:

Read Matthew 7:24-27. Only a house whose foundations are firm can withstand the storm, and only a life whose foundations are sure can stand the test. Jesus demanded that people should listen and that they should obey. Knowledge only becomes relevant when it is translated into action. Hearing and doing are summed up in the word obedience. How are you hearing God’s Word? How are you obeying God’s Word?

THE SOWER

THE BIBLE: Matthew 13:3-8; 19-23

THEME: We can discover what Jesus wants us to do by hearing the parables Jesus told.

PREPARING THE LESSON

1. MAIN IDEA: Jesus told people to listen to his teachings and to follow them.

2. MEMORY VERSE: “The seeds that fell on good ground are the people who hear and understand the message.”—Matthew 13:23a CEV

3. MAJOR LEARNINGS:

Children will learn that they need to be good soil to hold God’s love so that God’s love will grow in them.

4. BIBLE BACKGROUND:

In this lesson we see an example of how Jesus taught the people about God. He used everyday incidents and events to illustrate the truth he wanted them to understand. Agriculture was a major business in Galilee, and sowing seed would have been a common experience or at least a common sight for Jesus’ hearers. Farmers owned grain fields next to their neighbors’ fields with boundaries marked only by stones. After preparing the soil by plowing (if they thought it needed plowing), they would scatter handfuls of seeds over it with sweeping arm motions as they walked its length and breadth. Finally, they would plow a second time to cover the seed with dirt. As the seed was scattered, some of it would fall beyond the boundaries of the field, perhaps on a well-trodden path at the field edge or in soil that lay in a thin layer over rock. Jesus told his disciples that these various kinds of soil in his story represented the conditions of those to whom the word of God was preached. Those who were represented by seed growing in good soil were those who understand God’s word and act on it.

5. UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS:

Children understand things which they can see, touch and hear. They have difficulty understanding symbols, and things that they cannot know with their senses. Thus, they will have no trouble understanding about sowing seed, for they are familiar with that. But the difficulty will be in understanding what these stand for in the story. You can tell the story to younger children. Then tell them simply that Jesus was saying that some people would listen to his words and try to live in loving ways as God wanted them to. Others would not. Later, when they are older, the story will have a deeper meaning for them. The older children can begin to understand the meaning, if you explain it.

6. DEVELOPING YOUR FAITH:

Who then are the hearers described and warned in this parable? Can we identify with any of the hearers? 1. There is the hearer *with a shut mind*. What can shut our minds? (Prejudice, fear of new truth or pride.) 2. There is the hearer with the mind like shallow ground. That is the person who *fails to think things out and think them through*. This hearer quickly joins any new group but gives up when things get difficult. 3. There is the hearer who has *so many interests in life that often the most important things, get crowded out*. This hearer becomes too busy to pray, he/she becomes so preoccupied with so many things he/she forgets to study God’s Word. 4. There is the hearer like good ground. His/Her mind is open and he is prepared to hear. He understands because he has thought it out. He translates his hearing into action. The real hearer is the person who listens, who understands and who obeys.

—William Barclay

THE FORGIVING FATHER

THE BIBLE: Luke 15:11-32

THEME: We can discover what Jesus wants us to do by hearing the parables Jesus told.

PREPARING THE LESSON

1. MAIN IDEA: Jesus told people about God’s forgiveness and love for them.

2. MEMORY VERSE: “You willingly forgive, and your love is always there for those who pray to you.”—Psalm 86:5 CEV

3. KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS TO BE LEARNED:

- a. Forgiveness.
- b. Be willing to say “I am sorry” to others and to God.

4. MAJOR LEARNINGS:

Children will understand that when we are sorry for doing wrong and hurtful things, God is always ready to forgive us. The children will feel glad that they are loved by God.

5. BIBLE BACKGROUND:

Jesus told this story to help his listeners (and us) understand the depth of God’s grace. In the story, God is like the father who never stops loving either of his sons, though one removes himself physically and the other emotionally from that love.

The early division of the estate was unusual in that time. By law each one would have received his inheritance at his father’s death. By asking for his share in advance, the younger one treated the father as if he were dead and gave up any further legal claim to his father’s resources.

The father’s action in running to meet his young son was surprising to Jesus’ listeners. To run was to lose dignity. Then the father not only forgave the son but treated him with special regard. Each of the items called for—robe, ring, sandals—was a sign to all that the son was accepted back into the father’s household.

6. UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS:

Not all fathers or mothers are as loving as the father Jesus portrayed. Some children may not have a father in the home. Emphasize the loving actions of the father more than his relationship to the son as you point out that God loves and forgives us in the same way.

7. DEVELOPING YOUR FAITH:

Read Luke 15:11-32. We know it’s hard to say, “I am sorry”. It might even be harder to say “I forgive you”, and really mean it. When God forgives, God takes all those memories of what we have done wrong and throws them away, never to be brought up again.